



Families for Teens

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Today, we will discuss:

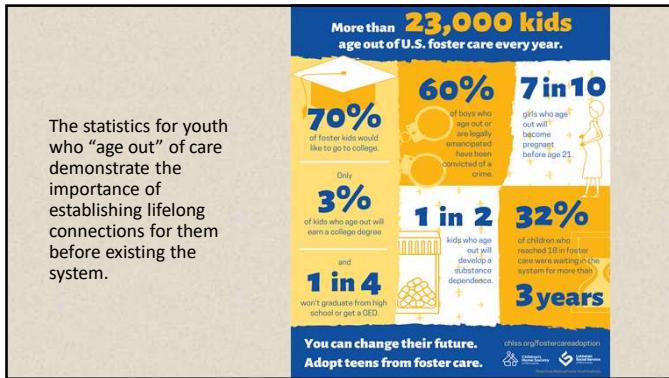
- The importance of building lifelong supportive connections for youth regardless of their goal (relational + legal permanency)
- “Unpacking the no” with young people and caring adults
- The Four Main Principles of *Families for Teens*
- LGBTQ+ humility, awareness, and practices

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FCFC DEFINES PERMANENCY AS “HAVING THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND CARE OF A COMMITTED FAMILY”.

Efforts to facilitate both legal and relational permanency for all youth must continue with the highest degree of urgency, regardless of the real and perceived barriers to doing so. Young adulthood should not be mistaken for truly independent adulthood. Young adults need a balance of autonomy and supportive structure to thrive independently.

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The topic of permanency can raise a variety of emotions for both youth in-care and the caring adults in their lives.

- Discussions about adoption and/or long-term planning with youth, parents, and other caring adults should be ongoing. Professionals should bring curiosity and compassion when exploring everyone's reactions.
- Actively listening to a youth's and/or adult's reluctance about permanency can be described as "unpacking the no." Practices to keep in mind:
 - Honesty is the best policy.
 - Ask open-ended questions.
 - Listen & normalize their feelings of doubt or uncertainty.
 - Leave the conversation open so they feel comfortable revisiting it later.

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Common Themes When "Unpacking the no" with young people

- Divided Loyalty
 - Changing of name
 - Reduced or no contact with birth relatives
- Fear of Rejection
 - "No one will adopt me" or "I'm unlovable/unadoptable"
- Desire to be independent

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Common Themes When “Unpacking the no”
with caring adults

- Age
- Financial and/or legal responsibility
- Unsupportive family members and friends
- For Kinship caregivers, concerns about the shift in family dynamics and roles

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Four principles of *Families for Teens*

1. And/Both
2. Rule-in vs. Rule-out
3. Teamwork
4. Patience & Persistence

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Principle #1: And/Both

- Professionals and adults, alike, often present young people with a “menu” of options regarding permanency. This can, at times, make young people and family members feel as if they must choose one or the other (i.e. either/or) when, in most cases, they can choose several options to support successful permanency (i.e. AND/BOTH).
- Few examples:
 - A young person can be adopted as well as secure independent housing
 - A young person can have multiple parents with various roles and connections
 - A young person’s behavior can prove challenging AND they still need/deserve family

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Principle #2: Rule-In vs. Rule-Out

- Whether you're a parent, professional, or both, we must actively **RULE PEOPLE IN** who young people identify as supports in their lives. This means exploring everyone regardless of mental/medical health diagnoses, criminal history, family composition, socioeconomic status, and individual/family culture.
- Reviewing a youth's placement history can unearth connections to caring adults that may have disengaged or faded throughout their time in-care and/or resources that were previously ruled out.
- Few examples:
 - Re-evaluating and engaging birth and/or fictive relatives
 - Think "outside the box" regarding caring adults in the lives of youth
 - A Termination of Parental Rights can be vacated when parents are better prepared to care for their children.
 - A foster/adoptive home can be licensed for one youth/sibling group when a strong connection exists, even when minor concerns are present.

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Principle #3: Teamwork

- Working **WITH** (not for) youth and caring adults is key to successful permanency. The goal should always be to have as many caring adults around each young person/sibling group as possible. Each will have their own role and contribution in supporting the young people and family.
- Few examples:
 - Youth-centered and driven permanency planning
 - Use of tools, such as Ecomaps, Genograms, and Connectedness Mapping
 - Identifying and leveraging the strengths of family leaders who can support successful permanency from within the family
 - Mindset of "building a support team for this youth and their family" when engaging caring adults and community resources. This is essential in concurrent planning for professionals.

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Principle #4: Patience & Persistence

- Permanency is not a linear process, so our patience and persistence is critical to securing permanent, committed connections for young people.
- Don't give up and never lose sight of the importance of Family for Everyone. And, don't allow others-involved to lose this sight either!
- Few examples:
 - Some young people are surrounded by positive connections, while others are not. Thus, this process is unique to each individual and their supports, including the timeline.
 - There can be many barriers to positive permanency for youth affected by foster care. When plans get delayed and/or shift, anyone involved might be discouraged by the hurdles. We must remain steadfast in our pursuit of **Families for Teens**.

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Positive Permanency for LGBTQ+ Youth

- Help LGBTQ+ youth build resilience through accepting family & positive relationships
 - a. Ecological approach
 - b. Provide concrete support to families of LGBTQ+ youth
- Change the conversation (and mindset) at our agencies & in our homes
 - a. Breakdown myths & stereotypes
 - b. Appropriate language
- Adapt our approach to best-serve LGBTQ+ foster youth
 - a. Ongoing education, training, & coaching
 - b. Advocate-for & pursue policy changes to protect & affirm all LGBTQ+ youth

*These are not sequential. They should be assessed & implemented throughout our efforts (i.e. meaningful partnerships).

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Impact of Rejecting Attitudes & Behaviors

LGBTQ+ youth who were highly rejected by parents &/or caregivers were:

- More than 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide
- Nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression
- More than 3 times as likely to use illegal drugs, and
- More than 3 times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections ... when compared to LGBTQ+ youth who were not-at-all or only slightly rejected by parents &/or caregivers – because of their SOGIE.

This slide informed by: Ryan, C. Family Acceptance Project, 2009.

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Foster family acceptance project

- Compared outcomes of LGBTQ+ youth placed in accepting homes vs. LGBTQ+ youth placed in rejecting homes. Youth in accepting homes reported:
 - Higher levels of happiness,
 - More confidence in life decision-making,
 - Higher rates of positive permanency, and
 - Higher levels of trust with other people.

This slide informed by: Adam McCormick, Kathryn Schmidt, Samuel R. Terrazas Foster family acceptance: Understanding the role of foster family acceptance in the lives of LGBTQ youth, 2015.

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Considerations

1. Start with the youth. They are powerful & should be in the driver's seat. Who do they currently consider 'family'? Not our job to convince or coerce youth into family. Be patient with this process.
2. The biological family. Do not assume that thoughts, feelings, & behaviors are still the same or cannot positively change. And, just because parent(s) or caregivers are not accepting & affirming does not mean other relatives will not be.
3. Accepting & affirming foster/adoptive parents. Recruit, coach, & support foster homes that are appropriate for LGBTQ+ youth. Think outside the box when recruiting & include youth in the process. Ask foster/adoptive families to take the "Affirming Home Pledge".

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Accepting & affirming family

- The single most significant factor in predicting resilience & positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth is a *family that is accepting & supportive of the youth*.
- Identify effective ways to work with families to help them modify rejecting behaviors & increase their level of support. These efforts ultimately strengthen families & help LGBTQ+ youth stay-at and receive support from home.

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Affirming Home Pledge

I pledge to open up my affirming home to an LGBTQ+ young person in foster care by taking the following actions:

1. Treat all children in my home equally.
2. Express acceptance if my child comes out as LGBTQ+.
3. Encourage my LGBTQ+ child to speak openly and honestly about who they are.
4. Welcome my LGBTQ+ child to participate in all family activities.
5. Encourage all family members and close friends to respect my LGBTQ+ child.
6. Believe my LGBTQ+ child can have a happy future as an adult.
7. Invite my LGBTQ+ child's friends to my home and to family events.
8. Work to make my community and faith groups supportive of LGBTQ+ people.
9. Advocate for my LGBTQ+ child when they are bullied, harassed, or discriminated.
10. Introduce my LGBTQ+ child to affirming organizations and events.

I take this pledge because I believe all children, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, deserve to feel safe, supported, and nurtured at home.

NYC's ACS:
<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/lgbt-support.page>

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Ongoing support for LGBTQ+ Young Adults

- Accepting & affirming engagement.
- Support LGBTQ+ youth with their 'coming out' process.
- Research & refer LGBTQ+ resources & supports in the youth's community.
- Assist youth in identifying appropriate LGBTQ+ adults for mentorship & guidance in a heteronormative society.
- Advocate for LGBTQ+ youth's safety & wellbeing at home, residence, & school.
- If available, encourage youth to participate in a Gay-Straight Alliance at school.

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Ongoing support for families

- Support families with their child's 'coming out' process, plus their own.
- Research & refer LGBTQ+ resources & supports in the family's community.
 - PFLAG: <https://www.pflag.org/>
- Educate families on the importance of an accepting & affirming environment for their LGBTQ+ youth as well as the potential negative outcomes if not provided. Provide examples & model accepting behaviors.
 - Family Acceptance Project: <https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>

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Let's change the dialogue!



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LGBTQ+ Identities, Language, & Terminology

- Always use respectful, inclusive, and gender-neutral language.** Examples include: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, sexual orientation, non-binary, gender identity, "involved with someone," "partner," and "parent(s)."
- Do not use value-laden and outdated terms,** including but not limited to: "homo," "homosexual," "sexual preference," "alternative lifestyle," "trannie," "transvestite," "it," "he/she," "faggot," "dyke," "sex change/the surgery," "deviant," "fooling or deceiving," etc.
- Remember that some terms may be acceptable and/or preferable to one person and offensive to another.** Reflect/mirror the language and terminology employed by that youth or family member (when appropriate) during one-on-one interaction.

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Creating Safe & Brave Spaces: Best Practices

- Best interests of the youth
- Never assume
- Create an affirmative work environment
- Use appropriate terminology
- Maintain confidentiality, when possible
- Identify affirming family resources for LGBTQ+ youth
- Implement uniform data collection
- Report LGBTQ+-related incidents



https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/lgbtq/Respectfully_Asking_SOGI_Questions.pdf

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Creating Safe & Brave Spaces: Resources

- Human Rights Campaign:
<http://www.hrc.org/resources/all-children-all-families-about-the-initiative>
- Respectfully asking SOGIE questions:
https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/lgbtq/Respectfully_Asking_SOGI_Questions.pdf
- FAP's Mental Health Assessment:
http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/files/Mental_Health_Assessment%20Protocol.pdf
- NCCC's Self-assessment checklist for personnel providing services & supports to LGBTQ youth & their families: <https://nccc.georgetown.edu/assessments/>

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Let's adapt our approach!

1. Acknowledge questions about LGBTQ+ affirming signage
2. Assess and answer any clarifying questions
3. Spend time educating, informing, or sharing resources
4. Determine if additional support/resources are needed
5. Stay engaged and continue the dialogue
6. Respond to and address negative behaviors
7. Demonstrate affirming behaviors

NYC's ACS:
<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/lgbt-support.page>

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Example Challenges to Creating An Affirming Environment

- Facial expressions that reveal discomfort, confusion, dislike, or disgust
- Lack of common courtesy or politeness
- Off-handed remarks about gender non-conformity or appearance
- Being ignored or isolated by peers
- Purposeful use of wrong pronouns or name (or lack of willingness to self-correct)

NYC's ACS:
<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/lgbt-support.page>

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Take the Ally Pledge!

I pledge to nurture & grow my commitment to more fully supporting LGBTQ+ children, youth, & families by taking the following actions:

1. Recognize that LGBTQ+ youth are receiving services from your agency
2. Educate yourself & co-workers
3. Use gender neutral language when discussing dating
4. Develop comfort when using LGBTQ+ language
5. Have visible LGBTQ+ resources & signage in your office
6. Acknowledge & address coming out issues with youth
7. Be non-judgmental
8. Intervene when you witness LGBTQ+ peer harassment/violence
9. DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS
10. Listen & ask clarifying questions

NYC's ACS:
<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/lgbt-support.page>

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Coaching & Advocacy resources

- HRC's All Children - All Families Webinar Series: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/all-children-all-families-webinars>
- Lambda Legal: <https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-how-the-law-protects>
- National Center for Transgender Equality: <http://www.transequality.org/>
- Center for the Study of Social Policy - getREAL Initiative: <https://www.cssp.org/reform/child-welfare/get-real>
 - AND...
 - Don't forget your local LGBTQ+ supports!

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Believe in positive change



"Once you do away with the idea of people as fixed, static entities, then you see that people can change, & there is hope."

– bell hooks

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Thank you for joining us, today!

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